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ABSTRACT

In the follow-up survey that serves as the focus of this report, questionnaires were sent to 430 Michigan State University alumni who earned an Ed.S or Ph.D degree in Education during a four year period from 1982 to 1985. Responses from 254 alumni were returned. This report offers an overview of some of the findings with respect to the graduates' backgrounds, attitudes, degree experiences, and professional achievements. Comparisons with a 1982 survey of 494 alumni, who graduated between 1976 and 1981, are given whenever there appears to have been an important change in graduates' characteristics or attitudes. A discussion is presented of graduates' comments on what changes (if any) should be made in the graduate program, and what characteristics of the program were the most beneficial. Some basic questions are posed about program changes suggested by graduate concerns and other findings. (JD)

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# Research and Evaluation in Teacher Education

Program Evaluation Series #13

SURVEY OF ADVANCED DEGREE GRADUATES  
OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
1982-1985 Academic years

Robert Craig & Don Freeman



Department of Teacher Education  
and  
Office of Program Evaluation

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College of Education  
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SURVEY OF ADVANCED DEGREE GRADUATES, 1982-85

A Report to the Graduate Education Policy Committee

In the follow-up survey that serves the focus of this report, questionnaires were sent to 430 MSU alumni who earned an Ed.S or Ph.D. degree in Education during a four year period from 1982 to 1985. Seventy-two Ed.S. and 182 Ph.D. alumni (59%) responded. The purpose of this report is to provide the GEPC with an overview of some of the findings with respect to the graduates' backgrounds, attitudes, degree experiences, and professional achievements. Comparisons with a 1982 survey of 494 alumni who graduated between 1976 and 1981 are given whenever there appears to have been an important change in graduates' characteristics or attitudes. We conclude the report with several questions for consideration by the GEPC. These questions were among those most frequently suggested by our review of graduates' responses to survey items or in their open-ended comments.

I. Entering Characteristics

Gains in female, American Indian and Asian representation were apparent.

|          |                           |          |                     |
|----------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|
| In 1985: | 48% were women            | In 1982: | 31% were women      |
|          | 12% were minorities       |          | 10% were minorities |
|          | 6.1% were black           |          | 6.9% were black     |
|          | 2.9% were Asian           |          | 0.4% were Asian     |
|          | 0.4% were Hispanic        |          | 0.8% were Hispanic  |
|          | 2.4% were American Indian |          | 1.9% were Other     |

The College continued to draw many of its advanced degree candidates from MSU or other colleges in Michigan, with a concentration of undergraduate majors in education or social science.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Bachelor's degree: | 25% MSU<br>30% other college in MI<br>39% other US college<br>6% college outside USA                      |
| Master's degree:   | 50% MSU<br>22% other college in MI<br>27% college outside MI  |
| Undergrad majors:  | 36% Education<br>31% Social Science<br>16% Humanities<br>7% Math-Natural Science<br>10% other disciplines |

The distributions of undergraduate GPAs for the advanced degree candidates surveyed in 1985 and 1982 were very similar. About the same percentages of those participating in the two surveys had met the usual requirement for regular admission to graduate study (3.0) and about the same number were below the usual requirement for provisional admission (2.5).

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1985 Undergrad GPAs: | 24% 3.50 or higher<br>37% 3.00 - 3.49<br>22% 2.75 - 2.99<br>10% 2.50 - 2.74<br>7% below 2.5 |
|----------------------|---|

The number of graduates reporting K-12 or other teaching and administrative experience before enrolling in an advanced degree program continued to be high.

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| K-12 Experience:                  | 71% had been teachers at some point in their careers<br>35% had been administrators  |
| When they began advanced degrees: | 26% were K-12 teachers<br>23% were K-12 administrators<br>24% were in higher education jobs<br>17% had other education related jobs<br>9% were not in education work |

## II. Age and Time in Program

Almost all (90%) of these advanced degree graduates were over 30 when they completed their degree work. Two-thirds (66%) were over 35 and more than one-third (39%) were over 40.

The average time Ph.D. candidates took to complete their degree work varied from less than three to more than eight years.

|                               |                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| From admission to graduation: | 28% 3 years or less  |
|                               | 19% 4 years          |
|                               | 24% 5 years          |
|                               | 23% 6 to 8 years     |
|                               | 7% more than 8 years |

### III. Financial Support for Graduate Study

The College of Education continues to lag in financial support for advanced degree graduates.

|                                 |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Proportion of support from MSU: | 59% none              |
|                                 | 17% < 1/3             |
|                                 | 13% 1/3 to 2/3        |
|                                 | 9% > 2/3, but not all |
|                                 | 2% all                |

Perhaps because of inadequate financial support from MSU, advanced degree candidates appear to be working more off campus. When asked how much of their course work they completed while also working off campus full time, the percentages of respondents in each category were:

|              |                        |              |                       |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| <u>1985:</u> | 35% all courses        | <u>1982:</u> | 32% all courses       |
|              | 14% > 2/3, but not all |              | 8% > 3/4, but not all |
|              | 12% 1/3 to 2/3         |              | 4% 1/4 to 1/2         |
|              | 13% < 1/3              |              | 10% < 1/4, but some   |
|              | 26% no courses         |              | 43% no courses        |

### IV. Curricula and Courses Graduates Took and Would Take

The number of graduates representing each program area varied widely. The University's numerical codes were not used to identify majors because some curriculum and major codes were discontinued or combined with others during the years these alumni were earning advanced degrees. Instead, graduates were asked to select their majors from a list of program areas.

Each of the twenty-one major program areas was chosen by at least one of the 173 graduates who responded to this item. Among the areas selected, only five had more than 10 graduates from 1982 to 1985. These five areas

were chosen by 71% of those responding:

21% in Curriculum and Instruction  
19% in K-12 Administration  
14% in University Administration  
10% in Counseling Psychology  
7% in School Psychology

When the graduates were asked about the courses they had taken in their major field and the number they would take if they were to begin again:

| Number of Courses<br>in major fields: | <u>Taken</u> | <u>Would Take</u> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
|                                       | 10% 1-6      | 4% a lot less     |
|                                       | 16% 7-9      | 13% some less     |
|                                       | 24% 10-12    | 61% same number   |
|                                       | 9% 13-15     | 17% some more     |
|                                       | 31% over 15  | 4% a lot more     |

When these question were asked about courses taken outside the College of Education:

| Number Courses<br>Outside COE: | <u>Taken</u> | <u>Would Take</u> |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
|                                | 15% none     | 1% a lot less     |
|                                | 14% 1 - 3    | 4% some less      |
|                                | 31% 4 - 6    | 38% same number   |
|                                | 20% 7 - 9    | 41% some more     |
|                                | 20% over 10  | 18% a lot more    |

When asked to identify the areas in which they would take more course work if they were to begin again, two of the five areas chosen most frequently were again the two with the most majors. However, three of the five most popular areas--program evaluation, current/ethical issues and field-based methodology--were neither majors nor general requirements and may represent unmet needs in graduate programs.

| Course work Area       | Number of Courses Taken |       |             |  | % Would Take More |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------------|--|-------------------|
|                        | % None                  | % 1-3 | % 4 or more |  |                   |
| Administration         | 22                      | 37    | 42          |  | 28                |
| Curriculum             | 26                      | 40    | 34          |  | 21                |
| Statistics-Research    | 8                       | 70    | 23          |  | 19                |
| Psych. Foundations     | 19                      | 4     | 18          |  | 19                |
| Measurement            | 18                      | 75    | 8           |  | 14                |
| Current/Ethical Issues | 18                      | 75    | 7           |  | 23                |
| Soc-Phil-Hist Fndtns   | 21                      | 72    | 7           |  | 13                |
| Fid-Based Methodology  | 61                      | 36    | 4           |  | 21                |
| Program Evaluation     | 42                      | 55    | 3           |  | 37                |
| Motor Lrng-Development | 54                      | 17    | 2           |  | 11                |
| Biological Fndtns      | 85                      | 13    | 2           |  | 8                 |
| History-Historiography | 85                      | 15    | --          |  | 7                 |
| Sociolinguistics       | 88                      | 12    | --          |  | 5                 |

#### V. Evaluations of The Degree Program and Course Work

Most graduates said that the degree helped them advance professionally:

80% said it increased their professional opportunities

63% said it increased their earning power

37% said they were "better qualified than graduates of other schools"

84% would probably recommend the program to others

Respondents were most likely to say their graduate studies made important contributions in the following areas of responsibility:

82% in research and evaluation

79% in program planning

74% in professional service activities

70% in administration

66% in teaching

Participants were also pleased with the quality of their course work for the degree. When asked about courses in their major, the percentages of participants who said the majority of their courses were:

high in overall quality = 65%

well organized = 65%

challenging = 59%

For courses outside their major, the percentages were slightly higher:

high in overall quality = 70%

well organized = 64%

challenging = 66%

## VI. Evaluations of The Guidance Committee

These graduates were generally positive about their guidance committees' assistance and encouragement. The percentages who rated their committees exemplary, strong or adequate in each area were:

| <u>Exemplary</u> | <u>Strong</u> | <u>Adequate</u> |   |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|---|
| 33%              | 24%           | 33%             | in program planning                     |
| 41%              | 26%           | 20%             | for personal support                    |
| 37%              | 29%           | 16%             | in press for excellence                 |
| 23%              | 25%           | 25%             | for help with comprehensives            |
| 40%              | 29%           | 24%             | for help with dissertation (Ph.D only). |

## VII. The Comprehensives Examination Experience

These doctoral graduates' evaluations of the comprehensive examinations belied the supposedly traumatic nature of this experience:

- 88% passed all areas the first time
- 72% agreed they were a valid measure
- 73% said preparation for the exams was a good learning experience
- 75% said they were given a clear sense of the content on which they would be tested
- 88% thought they received adequate feedback

The time which these graduate's reported spending in preparation for the comprehensives varied from less than one week to ten or more weeks:

- 8% less than one week
- 32% one to three weeks
- 35% four to six weeks
- 13% seven to nine weeks
- 12% more than ten weeks

## VIII. The Doctoral Dissertation Experience

Surveys continued to be the most common methodology used in dissertations with research design a close second. When asked which methodology was central to their dissertation:

- 47% chose survey methods
- 41% chose experimental design
- 10% chose ethnography
- 2% chose historical

When asked how well they had been prepared to use the methodology needed for their dissertation research:

- 17% said they were thoroughly prepared
- 61% said adequately prepared
- 21% said they were not adequately prepared

Most dissertation committees were said to include members with expertise in the theory/professional literature and the research methods that were central to the dissertation:

- 87% for literature review
- 90% for research methods

The time required to complete the dissertation varied from less than 20 weeks to more than 80 weeks with greater percentages of graduates reporting longer periods:

- 5% less than 20 weeks
- 23% 21 to 40 weeks
- 32% 41 to 60 weeks
- 22% 61 to 80 weeks
- 19% more than 80 weeks

#### IX: Accomplishments After Graduate School

At the time of the survey, 86% had positions within the field of education. The distribution of primary responsibilities of this group of respondents was:

- 35% in Administration
- 29% in Teaching
- 20% in Professional Services
- 11% in Program Planning
- 5% in Research or Program Evaluation

Although only 14% of these graduates published articles based on their dissertation, they have had many other notable achievements since they received their degrees:

- 54% presented a professional paper or talk
- 30% published one or more articles
- 14% published articles based on their dissertation
- 46% wrote grant or contract proposals
- 39% were elected to leadership positions
- 13% received grants or fellowships
- 10% received awards for teaching excellence
- 22% received other professional honors

X. Graduates' Comments on Needed Changes and Beneficial Aspects

The graduates were asked to comment on two questions: (1) What changes, if any, do you feel should be made in the graduate program in which you have participated? (2) What characteristics of your graduate program have been the most beneficial?

Only a few common themes were apparent in the responses. Other problems or benefits were suggested by no more than one or two individuals and appeared to be unique to personal experience with course work, the guidance committee, or the University's support services.

The three topics that were addressed most often, and the percentage of responses for each one, were:

- 21% interactions with faculty
- 11% course work outside the major or college
- 10% internships or practicums

Twenty-one students identified their interactions with faculty as the most rewarding and beneficial experience of their program. These positive experiences were about equally divided between relationships with the adviser or dissertation chairman and interactions with faculty generally. Some comments were enthusiastic and referred to "tremendous support of the adviser", and "the evident humanity" and "warmth" of the faculty.

Fifteen other students were apparently less fortunate in their relationships. These students called for more professional contact with faculty, more involvement of committees in the comprehensives or dissertation, more adequate and ongoing guidance by the committee, or more faculty office hours. One student complained that he never saw one committee member prior to the defense of his dissertation. Satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences occurred in several different programs and sometimes both occurred in the same program.

Seven students said that the course work they had taken outside the College of Education was the most beneficial characteristic of their program. Three times this number called for more courses outside the College. The disciplines most frequently identified by those who had benefited from courses in other colleges were psychology and business. Psychology and business were also the disciplines most often mentioned by those who wanted more course work outside the College of Education to strengthen their majors. One or two other persons wanted more required courses from the statistics department. Within the college of Education, counseling, learning disabilities and administration courses were most likely to be mentioned by majors in other areas.

The additional course work requested by these graduates closely related to their professional responsibilities. Their comments emphasized the need to utilize the expertise of faculty in other units in and out of the College of Education to improve the offerings in the major.

Twelve persons called for internship and practicum opportunities. An equal number from other programs which have an internship requirement praised this experience and identified it as the most beneficial part of their program. Others mentioned "hands on projects" and "workshops" as similarly desirable experiences.

A few respondents (eight) were concerned with provisions for students with special needs, particularly those who work full-time. One person asked for the organization of a special group to investigate the needs of students who had to work full-time. Another commented on the lack of an adequate information system for off-campus students. Others asked for more courses and more opportunities to consult with faculty on evenings and weekends. On the other hand, several graduates expressed appreciation that their program was flexible enough to allow full-time work during the degree program.

XI. Questions That Should Be Addressed:

As the data reported here suggest, responses to nearly all questions on the survey were positive. Nevertheless, some individuals did express significant concerns in their negative responses to structured questions or in their open-ended comments. We are convinced that the GEPC should give serious consideration to certain basic questions suggested by these concerns and by the other survey findings.

(1) What changes, if any, should be made to improve College of Education policies and practices that impact upon doctoral-level students who work full-time?

The number of degree candidates who continue to work full-time appears to be increasing. About one-third of the participants in this survey completed all Ph.D. courses while working full-time. The comments of graduates who continued their full-time employment while earning an advanced degree suggest a possible need for more flexible policies, changes in course scheduling, improved access to faculty, and improved communications. Enrollment statistics and the goals of Lifelong Education also suggest a need to review our treatment of this pool of potential degree candidates.

(2) Should the College of Education institute a college-level internship program?

The data suggest a clear need for greater financial support for graduate students. There is also ample evidence to suggest that our graduates believe that important educational benefits will be gained from professional internship experiences. We, therefore, believe the GEPC should consider the question of whether a college-level internship program be established, similar to those now being implemented on a more limited scale in some departments (e.g., CEPSE)? Such internships could pay students while they work with College of Education faculty and the staff of cooperating institutions in research or development activities of mutual concern.

(3) What steps, if any, should be taken to insure that ALL guidance committees take their responsibilities seriously?

Although respondents were typically very satisfied with their guidance committees, the data suggest that some committees may neglect critical responsibilities. For example, 10% of the respondents felt they received inadequate support from their guidance committees in program planning; seven percent said they did not receive adequate help with their dissertations. Moreover, at least 10% of all committees lacked members with expertise in the professional literature and/or research methods that were central to the candidate's dissertation. Although these numbers may seem small, they strike us as significant. Is there a need to put greater emphasis on the priority of committee functions and to find ways to promote and regulate their performance? Should we establish a program for the evaluation of committee members by candidates?

(4) What steps, if any, should be taken to improve the quality of dissertations?

Another disconcerting finding is that only 14% of our graduates have published articles that center on their dissertations (the corresponding figure in the 1982 survey was 23%). Moreover, only 45% said they were contemplating the preparation of manuscripts of this type. If the quality of dissertations throughout the College is high, why is the figure so low?

(5) Should program requirements include more courses in other colleges?

When asked, more than one-half of our alumni (59%) said they wished they had taken more course work outside the College of Education. Some documented the benefits to be gained from this course work in their open-ended comments. If guidance committees offered these program graduates sufficient incentives to elect career-related courses in other colleges, why is this figure so high?

Additional Information

Copies of the survey instrument, frequency distributions, and written comments are available from the Office of Program Evaluation. In addition, the Office will make every effort to respond to requests for additional data analyses that will assist in program or policy reviews.